

Interpreting Your Site

Workshop Notes #1



heritage inspired

south yorkshire's faith tourism initiative



Supported by

The National Lottery[®]
through the Heritage Lottery Fund



Heritage
Lottery Fund

Thank you for attending one or more of our training workshops for welcomers / guides. We hope that you found the sessions interesting and useful, and that you will be able to put into practice some of things we talked about. This booklet contains handouts from the first part of the 'Interpreting Your Site' workshop.



CONTENTS

THE BIG PICTURE

- Heritage Interpretation
- Faith Interpretation

THE VALUE OF EXCELLENT INTERPRETATION

THE BASICS

- Why Interpret Your Site
- Important Questions
- Ways to Interpret
- Things to Consider

SHARING INFORMATION

- Guided Tours
- Guided Walks
- Written Information
- Special Events

THE BIG PICTURE

HERITAGE INTERPRETATION

All heritage sites need interpretation.

Even an expert architect needs local information in order to interpret a building in the right way.

Many heritage sites are exploring ways to use their interpretation to help visitors interact with their site.

“If people understand their building, they will value it; by valuing it, they will want to look after it; in caring for it, they will help others enjoy it. From enjoyment of the historic environment comes a greater thirst to understand it and the circle begins again.”

Dr Simon Thurley, Chief Executive, English Heritage.

FAITH INTERPRETATION

Making faith sites open, accessible and ensuring a meaningful visit raises challenges. Many congregations are responding with increasing professionalism. (Building Faith in our Future, The Church of England)

If possible your church should be open during the day. The presence of legitimate visitors will help deter those with criminal intent. (Ecclesiastical Insurance)

“The parish churches of England are some of the most sparkling jewels in the precious crown that is our historic environment.”

Dr Simon Thurley, Chief Executive, English Heritage.



THE VALUE OF EXCELLENT INTERPRETATION

When interpreting your site for visitors, it is vital to remember that people are entering a special place, a living place and a place of prayer.

There are many similarities between faith sites and other heritage attractions, but the spiritual significance of a faith site should not be ignored.

People usually expect a faith site to be something of a sanctuary and a place where they can find peace and tranquillity.

Thinking about who will visit and why will help you to develop appropriate interpretation for your site, your welcomers and your visitors!



THE BASICS

WHY INTERPRET YOUR HERITAGE

Many people within South Yorkshire are unaware of the wealth of history and heritage on their doorsteps.

Many people outside South Yorkshire believe that it is made up of four dirty, industrial towns, with little or nothing to encourage them to come and visit.

Together we can dispel both of these views and not only get local people visiting their heritage, but taking an active role in promoting and conserving it.

We will get the visitors here.

You can show them a good time!

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

- Is there already information available about your site and its features?
- Is it written in plain english?
- Is information available in different formats?
- Do you have specific people who lead guided tours?
- Do you have a list of features that visitors should see? Are they accessible?

Overall, consider objectively: What impression would a visitor take with them?

WAYS TO INTERPRET

You can share information about your history and heritage in a number of ways:

- Guided tours and answering questions.
- Guided walks visiting heritage faith sites.
- Free leaflets, which give a brief walk around the site.
- Laminated sheets or 'paddles'.
- A full colour, attractive guidebook.
- Interpretative panels.
- Special events and activities.

Remember: History is much more than a collection of dates.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

There are nine million people with a disability in the UK, and they should not be excluded:

- We have legal responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act.
- We have a social responsibility provide information to everyone equally.

Meeting other specific needs:

- Ensure that visitors aren't disabled by your attitude.
- Offer interpretation appropriate to the needs of visitors from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and all ages.

The reputation of your site is based on the service standards you offer, including interpretation materials.

Delivering excellence:

- Setting standards should ensure consistency in levels of service.
- Aim high ~ make excellent service your goal.
- Exceed visitor expectations.



SHARING INFORMATION

GUIDED TOURS

Many heritage faith sites offer guided tours for visitors, for a variety of reasons:

- They allow contact with a member of the congregation or community.
- They are relatively easy to organise and set up.
- They can point out hidden treasures and things not normally noticed.

When you are planning guided tours, consider:

- Who will be in the group ~ general visitors, children, special interest groups?

Use your experiences:

- Think about guided tours you have been on. Did you enjoy them? Why?
- Think about guided tours that you might not have enjoyed. Why?
- Learn from other peoples mistakes and try to avoid making the same errors.

It is very important to think about the route you will take:

- Plan a route that shows off your site and its treasures.
- It is essential that you plan for any problems visitors might encounter.
- Plan your route with safety in mind. The site and route should always be checked for safety and potential hazards identified (a risk assessment).
- Walk the route to give you an idea how long it will take.
- Try practising on a group of friends.

Tell visitors approximately how long a tour will take and whether there are any

steep stairs or other possible problems.

Only take as many people in a group as you feel is safe and that you can properly look after and manage:

- It is better to aim for smaller rather than larger numbers. Having too many may result in the visit being spoiled for all.
- If there is the likelihood of a squash, tell people before entering so anyone who is claustrophobic can stay outside or go in later.
- If taking a large group is unavoidable, then take a second guide to help.
- Count the group at the start and finish ~ try to be unobtrusive!

Memorise your talk or use notes or an information file.

Try not to put all your information into a tour.

- Save something for questions!
- Do not feel embarrassed if you have to look information up in a file. You are a volunteer welcomer and visitors will respect that.
- If groups ask the same question, add a bit more information into your tour.

Very occasionally you may get a rude / aggressive visitor:

- Stay calm and don't rise to any comments.
- Take them to one side and explain they are spoiling the tour for others, or ask them to leave if appropriate.

Have confidence in yourself!

- You will know more about your site than the average visitor.
- As time goes by you will learn even more.
- Once you have done a couple of tours your confidence will grow.

Tour guiding should be enjoyable. You will meet some lovely and very interesting people, so enjoy yourself and your visitors will respond.

GUIDED TOURS FOR ADULTS

Find out about your group:

- Ask people about their background at the start..

Pitch your tour:

- Churches and other faith sites can be confusing.
- If you have a mixed group, give the person with the least knowledge what they need to know but add bits for more knowledgeable members.
- Explain obscure terms, or visitors may skip over them or start to lose interest.

Know the basics:

- You do not need to be an expert, but you should know the basic facts/dates.
- Exact dates will not mean much to most visitors, they just need a guide to how long ago something was built or when something happened.
- If there are any good stories linked with the site about somebody who lived in the past, or about something that happened in the past ~ tell them!

GUIDED TOURS FOR CHILDREN

Welcoming children is very different from taking adults around the same site.

Before the visit:

- Agree what you can offer and any rules you wish to make.
- Groups from schools should bring at least one adult per 10 children.
- Consider getting a Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) check and certificate.
- Always check whether there are children with special needs.
- IT IS IMPORTANT that the responsible adults are made fully aware that during the visit they are still responsible for the children's good behaviour.

During the visit:

- Get the group to settle down, and introduce yourself.
- You need to have planned a structured visit to the church, via a safe route.
- Working in pairs can be useful.

Conducting the tour:

- Plan your route carefully and include features that the children will enjoy.
- Get the children involved and ask them questions as you go round.
- Always make the tour a two-way dialogue.

Agree the time that the visit will take with the teachers/responsible adults. Try to keep to time. Teachers will get twitchy if you run over!

GUIDED WALKS

Guided walks including one or more heritage faith sites are an excellent way of encouraging visitors to your area.

There are specific things to consider when planning and leading guided walks:

- The success of the guided walk depends on planning and preparation.
- The route should follow a public right of way.
- If the walk crosses private land you should get written permission.
- Walk the whole route to ensure that there are no obstructions .
- It is very important that you consider the safety of yourself and the group when planning your route. Carry out a risk assessment and provide first aid.
- Stopping points must be pre-arranged and planned.
- Make sure you have at least one co-leader to walk at the back of the group.

WRITTEN INFORMATION

When writing text for an information sheet, guidebook or interpretative panel, you have to bear in mind your audience. Too much text can discourage all but the most interested visitors - a writer's over enthusiasm may put people off.

Bear in mind some of the problems that reading can present - poor eyesight, low lighting, dyslexia. Very few people are illiterate, but a surprising number have reading problems (eg long sight, bifocal glasses). The average reading age in the UK is 13.

Font size and type:

- At HERITAGE *INSPIRED* we use Arial font in at least point 18 size for exhibitions.
- A sans serif font (plain without fiddly bits added to letters) is easier to read.
- Some fonts look great and suitably 'heritage' but are quite difficult to read.
- Use a bigger font size for information notices warning against hazards.
- Leave lots of white space around lines and paragraphs.
- Try reading what you write at arms length to see how easy it is to read.
- If you want to emphasise something, put it in bold. Avoid using all capitals or italics, as they are hard to read.

Sentence length:

- What you write, rather than what you write about is the key to clear text.
- Some subjects use difficult language but can be communicated in a clear way.
- It is best to write sentences with one or two clauses. But, don't overdo it - a succession of sentences that are too short will read like a children's story.
- Include one main point per sentence. Use full stops rather than semi-colons.

Line length and paragraphing:

- Long lines can be difficult to read, especially in the middle of a body of text.
- If you are putting a lot of text on display, set it out in columns.
- Fully justified text is difficult to read - your eye can jump lines.

Choice of words and repetition:

- Many people feel that 'good' English means using long and complicated words. This is not the case, especially when writing for exhibitions or leaflets.
- The clearer and simpler the explanation, the more effective the text.
- Different styles of language suit different topics. Think about your audience.

Presentation:

- Create something that you would enjoy reading.
- Don't photocopy a copy of a copy. Try to get a fresh printout otherwise the letters will start to blur and the pictures will become meaningless.

Proof reading:

- It is essential to proof read the text before you print your information sheets.
- Don't rely on computer spell checks, they are useful but not fool proof.
- Read your text critically and carefully to yourself, and then get someone who has not been involved to proof read it.

SPECIAL EVENTS

The most important thing to consider is your audience...

Who are they? Where will they come from? What will they want to see and do?

It is a good idea to have in mind an end result (eg. to raise £1000, to welcome 300 visitors). Make sure everything you include will help you meet your target.

Planning:

- Failing to plan is like planning to fail. Give yourself enough time to plan properly, build into your plan time for publicity, preparation and cleaning up.

Preparation:

- If you spend enough time preparing for your event it will run smoothly, meaning that both your visitors and you can enjoy it more.
- If your church is open all the time consider closing whilst preparing.
- Talk to welcomers/guides about the event so that they can answer questions.

Publicity:

- There is no point in spending a great deal of time, effort and probably money to produce an event if no-one knows about it.
- Make sure that publicity is a key part of your planning and preparation.
- Consider an 'event style' for your publicity. This will ensure that anything a potential visitor sees they will associate with YOUR event.
- Make sure you include your funders logos on all publicity. If you didn't get grant funding or sponsorship consider it for next time.
- There are lots of ways to distribute publicity, eg press releases, posters to libraries, flyers with local papers etc.
- Your most effective marketing tool is your congregation/volunteers. Encourage them to take a handful of leaflets wherever they go (eg doctors, bus station, coffee mornings) and talk about the event to friends and family.

On the day:

- Make sure that everyone knows what they are supposed to be doing.
- Make sure you have someone who can cover for breaks and run around.
- Make sure everyone involved gets time to look around and enjoy themselves.

Evaluation:

- Make sure you evaluate your event. Count visitor numbers. Make a record of visitor comments. Did you achieve your target? Did you meet your aims? Did the event work? All this information will help you to plan future events.
- Make sure that official records (eg service books, accounts sheets) record the fact that there was a special event on. This may help you to persuade those who were not keen that the event does have a measurable effect.

HERITAGE INSPIRED

HERITAGE INSPIRED works with all heritage faith sites, and related buildings across South Yorkshire. This includes churches, chapels, mosques, gurudwaras, synagogues, Buddhist centres, temples, abbeys and more.

HERITAGE INSPIRED increases access to heritage and provides interactive experiences with it. We organise events, activities, guided walks, interpretation leaflets, guidebooks, local heritage talks & courses, website and of course volunteer workshops.

HERITAGE INSPIRED is unique, the only project of its kind in the country. It is independent and funded by grants and donations.

HERITAGE INSPIRED is a national leader in the field of faith site tourism.

www.heritageinspired.org.uk

Make sure your site is represented on our website!

You can download copies of all the leaflets we produce.

There is also more information for welcomers / guides to use when planning your heritage and tourism activities.



HERITAGE INSPIRED

Mexborough Resource Centre,
Dolcliffe Road, Mexborough, S64 9AZ

Tel/Fax: 0845 6529634

info@heritageinspired.org.uk

www.heritageinspired.org.uk
